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Cornell Researchers Receive Major Apple Grant

by Linda McCandless

Geneva, NY - Cornell University has received a three-year, \$717,000 grant from an anonymous donor to bring new technologies to New York apple growers and processors. Entomologists, plant pathologists, food scientists and horticulturists at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, NY, will apply their expertise to the development of new apple products and more cost-effective and environmentally friendly orchard production systems. Agricultural economists in Ithaca will evaluate market feasibility and consumer reactions to the new products.

The grant is being carried out in cooperation with New York industry. Major players include Seneca Foods in Pittsfield, Red Jacket Orchard in Geneva, Nature's Pleasures in Wolcott, and Earl's Meadery in Locke.

"We have three main objectives," said Harvey Reissig, entomologist at NYSAES, one of nine Cornell researchers listed on the grant. "The first is to develop a more sustainable, environmentally sound, economical apple production and integrated pest management system for apples so fruit is grown in an environmentally friendly manner that poses minimal risks to growers and consumers. The second is to stimulate the growth of the apple processing industry in New York State by developing technologies that support commercial production of diversified, high value apple products. The third objective is to assess the economic impacts, marketing potential, and consumer acceptance of these products."

In applying for the grant, researchers were responding to market pressures and industry demand. In order for the New York apple industry to remain competitive in global apple markets, growers are faced with making long-term investments that will bear fruit well into the 21st century. Older, less productive orchards need to be replanted with dwarf and semi-dwarf trees that yield good quantities of high quality apples that consumers will buy. Production systems need to be efficient and environmentally friendly, and the industry needs improved marketing options.

"For many years, researchers at Geneva have been developing integrated pest management (IPM) systems to improve control and reduce pesticide use in apple orchards using biological, cultural, and chemical controls that minimize risks and improve profitability," said Station Director James Hunter. "These funds will add greatly to our ability to capitalize on this work and carry out the research and extension program

to bring new technologies to apple growers and apple processors. We are very pleased that the donor recognizes the importance of Cornell's research and extension programs in apples, and has made a major financial commitment to support them."

Collaborative efforts among the state, apple growers and processors have supported apple research at Cornell in the past. These new funds will greatly accelerate the work of scientists at Geneva to strengthen the apple industry in New York and provide consumers with desirable products.

In addition to Reissig, the other investigators on the grant are Art Agnello (Entomology-Geneva), Wayne Wilcox (Plant Pathology-Geneva), Terence Robinson (Horticultural Science-Geneva), Steve Hoying (Horticultural Extension Specialist-Wayne County), Cy Lee and Mark McLellan (Food Science-Geneva), and Gerald White and Brian Henehan (Agricultural Resource and Management-Ithaca).

The New York apple industry is the second largest in the U.S., and the largest in the Northeast. Apples are produced on more than 56,000 acres and contribute an average farm gate value of \$125 million annually (1990-95 figures). New York apple growers produce 1.1 billion pounds of apples annually. They market an average of 471 million pounds of apples as fresh fruit and 577 million pounds as processing products, primarily as sauce, slices, juice, and cider, in canned, frozen and bottled form. There are three major apple production areas in New York, situated along Lake Ontario, the Hudson River, and Lake Champlain. Per capita, Americans consume an average of 46 pounds of apples each year. Of that, 19 pounds are fresh and 27 pounds are processed.

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